

Dale's Cone of Experience

In one of the first textbooks written about the use of audiovisual materials in schools, Hoban, Hoban, and Zissman stated that the value of such materials is a function of their degree of realism. In developing this concept, the authors arranged various teaching methods in a hierarchy of greater and greater abstraction, beginning with what they referred to as "the total situation" and culminating with "words" at the top of the hierarchy.^a

In 1946, Edgar Dale took the same construct and developed the "Cone of Experience."^b In the Cone of Experience, we start with the learner as participant in the actual experience, then move to the learner as observer of the actual event, to the learner as observer of a mediated event (an event presented through some medium), and finally to the learner observing symbols that represent an event. Dale contended that learners could make profitable use of more abstract instructional activities to the extent that they had built up a stock of more concrete experiences to give meaning to the more abstract representations of reality.

Psychologist Jerome Bruner, working from a different perspective, devised a descriptive scheme for labeling instructional activities that parallels Dale's. Bruner's concepts of enactive, iconic, and abstract learning can be superimposed on Dale's Cone of Experience. Bruner, though, emphasized the nature of the mental operations of the learner rather than the nature of the stimuli presented to the learner.

^aCharles F. Hoban, Sr., Charles F. Hoban, Jr., and Samuel B. Zissman, *Visualizing the Curriculum* (New York: Dryden, 1937), p. 39.

^bEdgar Dale, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), p. 108. Copyright 1946, 1954, 1969 by Holt, Rinehart & Winston. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart & Winston, CBS College Publishing.

^cJerome S. Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 49.